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3.6 Education

Being aware of the fact that the greatest asset of a democratic society is a well-prepared and educated citizen ĚSSD considers the providing of education its most important priority. For this reason it assumes the responsibility for school and educational policy and for its results and acknowledges the critical role of the State in creating conditions to ensure the equal access to education for all citizens without exception, and in ensuring quality education and its structure and also protecting children and youth against undesirable influences.

As a first objective of education we see the education of the citizen as an independent and free personality able to use the amount and quality of information well, able to think creatively and solve the problems, able to observe and understand the needs of other citizens and being fully responsible for their actions. We see education being a result of on-going educational activities of the institutions as well as personal effort as a basis for the political stability of society as it has a lasting influence on the values of citizens and on their way of thinking, their behaviour, actions and decisions not only in the regional but also in the European context. ĚSSD considers it the State's obligation to provide all the citizens of the Czech Republic with such a level of education and qualification, that when our country enters the European Union they will conform to the generally accepted conditions of working and social success in the whole European Union. Therefore the education content and structure and also the whole education system in the Czech Republic must conform fully to the generally accepted principles stated in the EU legislation. At the same time ĚSSD realizes that the education and up-bringing of a free and independent citizen can be provided only by an educated, free and independent teacher who has the respect of the community and is well-motivated and flexible.

We see education as an on-going life-time process. For this reason we do not see it as relevant to only a certain stage in life nor define it too specifically for a limited purpose, in accordance with the needs of modern society. Education is in our view the key to the 21st century.

ĚSSD realizes that the school system and education is a matter of society at large and therefore it will work on achieving adequate public recognition for both the school and the teacher:

- ◆ ĚSSD will try to ensure an annual increase in the education sector share of the state budget in the gross domestic product with the aim of reaching the European average, i.e. 6% share in the GDP, not later than 2001. The annual increase of 0.5% in the 1997 allocation means approximately CZK 7 billion to be used mainly for the development of university education (2 billion), increase in the wages of pedagogical employees (2 billion), funding of growing operational costs (2 billion) and to support investments. In this connection we will enact more suitable conditions for students: we will consider the possibility of the re-introduction of student and pupil transport reductions, and make provision for providing accessible accommodation and meals for high school and university students.
- ◆ It is mostly on the economic level that we will try to create the conditions for the consistent increase in the standard of schools and teaching staff including universities in order to increase the number of university students reaching the European Union level by 2005.
- ◆ ĚSSD will try to ensure the annual increase in teachers' wages so that the ratio in relation to other professions in our country is comparable to the developed countries of Western Europe. We will insist on the publication of new wage regulations for pedagogic employees.
- ◆ ĚSSD will, taking into account the establishment of the middle element of administration (the territorial self-governing regions), prepare a new education law on life-long education and the role of state administration and self-government in education. We will also consider the possibility of compulsory attendance of the kindergarten year before the children start school in the first grade, the establishment of standardized school leaving exams for pupils of the 9th grade of elementary school and standardized graduation for high-school students. We will seek to revise the network of schools and educational institutions based on the quality of their expertise and on their continued relevance. We will devote special attention to the training of teachers to better reflect the practical needs of society.
- ◆ In accordance with the situation in the EU member countries ĚSSD considers non-state education a desirable part of the educational spectrum but not its basis. Funds will be granted from the state budget to those schools whose existence in a particular area is necessary and to the extent that it can be done by the state budget (with the possibility of receiving 50-90% of the normal amount allocated to state schools).
- ◆ ĚSSD is aware that the most important aspect of the whole educational system are the elementary schools. Therefore it will require that the organizers of these schools - taking into account the negative population growth -

proceed carefully when closing or combining schools. It will also support the inner differentiation at elementary schools and seek to put to good use the experience of the upper-grade grammar schools in accordance with resolutions of the OECD.

- ◆ The active approach towards the constructive use of the leisure time of children and young people is another priority of ÈSSD and we will try to see that government creates suitable economic conditions for schools and educational institutions to organize sports, cultural, language and technical activities as a prevention against undesirable social influences. Also other organizations concentrating time and attention to the quality education of youth will be supported.

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(c) ÈSSD